

# The smart manager

India's first world-class management magazine



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## UNIVERSAL INSURANCE CAN CHANGE HEALTHCARE DELIVERY FOR THE BETTER.

**DR PRATHAP C REDDY**, Founder and Chairman - Apollo Hospitals Group  
**DR PREETHA REDDY**, Managing Director - Apollo Hospitals Enterprise Limited



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Illustration by Nilesh Juvalekar

How distinct is your brand's identity?



**WILLEM WOUDEBERG**  
IS THE FOUNDER AND CEO OF  
BRAND DIALOGUE.

# does your brand start conversations?

*In an interview in the magazine Kyoorius, Wally Olins—recognised as ‘the world’s leading practitioner of branding and identity’ by Financial Times—rightly pointed out, “...isn’t it about time Indian companies stopped talking about brands and stopped thinking about brands simply as little bits of design with a few words stuck underneath, and really thought about what branding is[?]”*

*In India, businesses are often valued on parameters such as revenues, profits, and market capitalization; very rarely is a business valued on its brand value. There is no dearth of globally influential companies in India, but these are not yet acknowledged as global brands. As Olins said, maybe it’s time for us to rethink our definition of branding.*

*Willem Woudenberg, who has been part of the branding industry for 25 years, shares his thoughts on global design imagination, and what India can learn from it.*

**I**ndia will be among the largest economies in the world besides the US and China in the not-too-distant future. It is amazing how much India has evolved. Over the past ten years, the country has truly made a mark on the global map. That’s remarkable! On the cultural side as well, India is extremely rich. Many

elements of India’s diverse cultures such as festivities, mythology, yoga, architecture and cuisines have had a profound impact globally.

In some domains, however, India has not yet manifested itself as a leading international player. According to a recent list of international brands, no



**An important feature of a strong brand is its own culture and personality.**

Indian brand has yet made it to the top 100 global brands list<sup>1</sup>. Although the criteria behind this list are black boxes (unknown), they reflect that major Indian companies such as Tata, Reliance, etc., although large globally, are not yet recognized as strong international brands. The question is: why?

### **develop design**

A strong brand means developing—on the basis of the widest possible distinction with other companies—its own unique place in the market, and creating a recognizable brand personality that is preferred and recalled by customers. A strong brand has a distinct identity in communication, through which behavior is propagated. Design plays a critical role in branding because visibility, tangibility, and innovation are strengthened and enhanced by it.

Design is a complex creative process that draws inspiration from the ordinary to the extraordinary. Perhaps, the most vital quality in a designer is the ability to absorb, infuse, and engage. In an era of a highly cluttered market and challenges imposed by cross-cultural influences, cost cutting and advertising budgets, marketers and brand managers need to understand and unveil the true power of design in building and sustaining brands.

Distinctiveness and awareness in the global market is still low for Indian brands. While companies in the US and Western Europe have built up a long-term marketing and branding experience of some 100 years, Indian companies have realized the need for strong marketing, designing, and branding only recently.

### **the *desi* branding scene**

Like Indian society, Indian business too seems more European than it is. Traditional roots and cultural backgrounds are still strong in the behavioral pattern. A typical Indian identity seems to be a combination of a strong traditional culture with adopted Anglo-European behavior. Companies are characterized by a focus on large cash flows and operational management and less on development. Therefore, investments in quality and innovation are often limited, and branding and design is seen as a luxury and not a must have requirement.

The power of many Indian companies is their entrepreneurial sense, their ability to adapt quickly, and a love for demonstrable results. As we know, in the West, not only all kinds of scientific research, but also the practice of many European and American companies for years has shown that branding is an important part of their business strategy. It may even double profits. Indian companies thus need to understand the promising potential of branding.

Here are five key learnings from my experiences in branding and design.

#### **01 invest for the long term**

Successful international brands such as Shell, P&G, Unilever and Philips have been around for a long time. They have gone through different stages in their life, have experienced growth and recessions, and have evolved as ‘international brands’. An important feature of a strong brand is its own culture and personality. There should be a set of norms, values and instruments that are not only beautiful, but also formulated to be realized practically. Then, these should be modified as per the customer’s behavior, and needs of changing times.

Time is crucial because no brand identity can be created overnight. For an everlasting relationship and brand recall, you need to sustain your branding efforts and induce subtle modifications from time to time. Employees are the main brand carriers. Indian companies have also realized this. Companies understand that the advice and service orientation of employees are decisive success factors in sales, and thereby create brand loyalty.

Strategy is often seen as a luxury or an impossibility. I once heard a marketer explain, “Our market is changing so rapidly that even a plan for half a year is not possible.” Of course, at a tactical level, flexibility is necessary, not only in the Indian market, but also in the West. Companies must create a distinctive brand vision that functions as a compass—a point on the horizon. Values must be built on the aim of the founders and where they want to see their brand 5–10 years from now.

### 02 branding is not just a logo

A logo is important as a symbol that influences a company’s reputation and recognizability. However, branding is much more than a logo; it covers all the ways a company comes into contact with the public: communication, marketing, products and services (behavior).

Researchers in the US, Sweden, and the Netherlands show that integrated branding can lead to powerful results if it is used as an important business tool aimed for the long term. Branding is the most critical part of the entire operations. In short, it is integrated into the business strategy and in support thereof. Successful brands such as Southwest Airlines, Starbucks, Apple, IKEA, and many renowned banks take it seriously.

### 03 create distinctiveness

In the modern market, which is increasingly dominated by international products and digital channels and services, the purchasing behavior of consumers is strongly influenced by distinctiveness. In the large, often anonymous marketplace it’s important to showcase something better, faster or more beautiful than competition. Branding strengthens this difference and creates a stronger experience and long-lasting relations.

Traditional Asian marketing does not emphasize the distinctiveness of products and services in a strong way. It’s about retaining customer relationship via favorable prices and traditional relations—something easily witnessed on the market streets of Indian cities, where medicine, grocery or household items are sold side by side. Often similar products are displayed at the same place. The difference between products and services of important Indian



**Branding is much more than a logo, it covers all the ways a company comes into contact with the public.**

companies is sometimes difficult to observe in the clutter. Strong, consistent branding at a product level or activating sub-brands (on company level) can strengthen their distinctiveness, in particular at an international level.

### 04 create aspiration

Last, but the most important and powerful role of branding and design is to help a product become aspirational. It needs to be able to interpret the essence of the need, its emergence, the consumers’ desire and struggle to be more and achieve more, and the challenges that are imposed





**Creatives can help companies connect and establish a dialogue with consumers enabling firms to innovate more efficiently.**

on their purchasing ability. Branding needs to communicate why the consumer must buy the product and also create the need in their minds. That is the power of great branding.

Recently, Indian companies have displayed progress and laid emphasis on the need to make a strong presence globally. It's surprising, yet remarkable that Fabindia, the native clothing brand, has stores in Rome, Dubai, and Singapore. Hidesign, the popular leather accessories brand, has come up with a dozen stores across the world including Moscow, Vienna, and Berlin. So it's no more surprising if you see popular Indian brand logos flashing on international shopping streets. This development further creates a significant need for branding and design to adopt

some of the best global practices and yet be uniquely 'Made in India.'

To conclude, I would like to add that creatives can help companies connect and establish a dialogue with consumers enabling firms to innovate more efficiently. The challenge for most corporations today is about how to innovate while minimizing risks. For consumers, decisions related to buying are made by balancing the need to progress with the compulsion of habit. So designers must not only create aesthetics, but also understand the consumer's psyche and emotions in order to influence behavioral change and focus on functionality. Some of the world's leading brands are also leaders in design and branding—it's an important factor to notice and ponder over. ■

01 <http://www.interbrand.com/en/best-global-brands/2013/Best-Global-Brands-2013.aspx>

